CHAPTER-1

Introduction
The status of woman in ancient times was on sound footing. V.V Prakasa Rao and V. Nandini Rao observed that the evolution of the status of women in India has been a continuous process of ups and downs throughout the history.

The period 2500 BC- 1500BC is usually referred to as the Vedic period. During this age, women enjoyed themselves a great extent of freedom along with the men and their sphere of role was not circumscribed by too many restrictions. From about 1500 BC, it started the change in women’s status, due to the various reasons among which the most important was a denial of education.

Now, with the advent of Independence and with the introduction of liberal educational and various Constitutional Guarantees and Safeguards, the position of women in Indian society has altered. Women are being now educated more and more in colleges, universities, and professional courses. They are employed in various governments, technical and non-technical jobs. As a result of education and employment, women are now found more open and frank in asserting their rights and privileges. Their status has undergone drastic changes. Now, women especially in urban areas are more or less secured. They feel more-open minded, assertive and secured.

The woman in the family, however, does not have much say in matters of decision making but usually on all social occasions such as marriage, of children and the maintenance of household affairs she is consulted by her husband. At present, the woman has equal rights with that of man even in selecting a life partner.
But the position of a woman in Scheduled Caste community presents a different picture. It has positive and negative points. At present, the Scheduled Caste women are invariably confined to their houses looking after their children attending to their domestic work as well as agriculture labour work etc.,

The Department of Social Welfare, Government of India, convened the first meeting of its Committee on the status of women in India on 3rd November, 1971. The meeting was held under the chairmanship of Dr. (Smt) Phulrenu Guha. It was decided to make a comprehensive study of the existing status of women in various spheres of Indian life, viz., economic, legal, political, social, educational and industrial. The idea was to find out the extent to which social changes have affected the status of Indian women since Independence and to what extent the ameliorative provisions in the Constitution of India for the Scheduled Castes have been helpful to percolate these changes in this field.

It was noted that some progress markedly in urban areas had been achieved. But in rural areas, of course, were still unaffected by any change in the status of Scheduled Caste women. In view of this, the Chairman of the Committee wrote to Shri Jiwanlal Jairamdas, the then secretary of the All India Harijan Sevak Sangh, New Delhi, in December 1971 and proposed to draw up a scheme to study the special problem of the women of the Scheduled Castes and make research based suggestions to remedy the situation.

In a brief note on the status of the Scheduled Caste women, the Secretary drew the attention of the committee on educational, economic, social and political backwardness of Harijan women in the country both in urban and rural areas. He stressed the point that though most of the women in India were backward in general and there were Harijan women in our country who were
backward among the backwards and therefore deserves special consideration not only to raise their status in their own communities but also to bring them on par with other women in all the spheres of life.

Referring to the social exploitation of the Scheduled Caste women in certain parts of India, he gave some examples of the existing deplorable conditions of Scheduled Caste women exploited for immoral traffic in flesh.

This exploitation more than anywhere else, had been rampant in three cultural regions of India, viz., northern parts of Karnataka, Chhatisgarh region in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Kashi region in the north western Uttarpradesh.

The Committee thereupon resolved at the tenth meeting of the Task force to request the Harijan Sevak Sangh to submit a research scheme to undertake the study of exploitation of Scheduled Caste women in these three regions.

Even before the formation of the committee on the status of women in India, many enlightened and dedicated Harijan Sevaks had expressed concern at the existence of prostitution among the Harijan women. They rightly saw in this practice, a threat to their efforts at raising the public image and status of Harijan communities with a view to put them on an equal footing with other castes and eventually help their integration with the rest of the society on equal terms. A brief mention must be made of some of these efforts before continuing further.

Foremost among these dedicated workers in the 80 years old veteran Padmashri kaka saheb Karkhanis of Bijapur in a booklet published by him he has discussed, without any reservations, the custom of dedicating Harijan Girls to family deities as Devadasis i.e., Servants of God and then forcing them to prostitution to earn their livelihood. Shri Karkhanis restricted his study to the problem as found in north Karnataka and his findings are used in developing the theme in sacred exploitation in Bijapur region.
Shri Viyogi Hari, formerly, president of the All India Harijan Sevak Sangh, New Delhi, wrote on Devadasis in a Hindi Journal, Antyodaya and supported the views of Karkhanis and discussed in greater details the universality of the problem in India, the role of Police in its prevention etc. He suggested concrete measures to prevent Harijan girls and young women becoming prostitutes.

There have been many other Harijan sevaks whose names should go on recorded for their serious concern and constant efforts to do their best to stem the tide of prostitution among Harijan women.

The present research study is an attempt to deal with the Socio-economic conditions of Mathammass in Chittoor District of Andhra Pradesh. Mathammass are nothing but Devadasis. Devadasi custom, where in a woman is dedicated to a deity or a sacred object, is under much discussion now a days.

**Concept of Devadasi**

Devadasi means a woman enslaved for the service of some deity or sacred object. The term is the feminine form of ‘Devadasa’ a man who is enslaved for the service of a deity. Though the term has its origin in Sanskrit word which means ‘god’s slave’. The prevailing custom and practices are in no way related to the Gods or Deities mentioned in Sanskrit literature, especially the Trinity. Today, however, there is not a temple in any part of the country without a Devadasi attached to it. In fact, a few temples have more than one Devadasi attached to them to render several types of services to the deities and sacred objects.

Several other factors are said to be responsible for the origin and existence of the Devadasi custom in India. One among them is that a few another is that the devotees themselves offered men and women to a deity for the service expecting something in return.
Every turn of the century brings along with it a lot of changes. Society is also undergoing a lot of changes over the centuries, but certain barbaric cultures and practices want to stay as such without any change. It is worth noting that the victims of such continued superstitious practices and beliefs are always women. The age old tradition of prostitution and Devadasi system are standing examples of such social evils. Though women are marching forward in many fields it is worth examining their conditions, who are caught in the vicious cycle of the Devadasi System.

It is a common practice for parents to think about marrying of girls when they become eligible for marriage after puberty. But it is shocking to learn that there are also parents waiting for girls to attain puberty so that they can dedicate them to gods and goddess of temples. The existing social evil of Devadasi system is an example of this.

One of the reasons for the perpetuation of the system of Devadasi is the urge among the religious leaders to imitate the royal families especially in having a ‘Harem’ for themselves. This became a status symbol for the king who was respected when he had a large contingent of women around him. The religious leader invested a new method of building women around. Using the women’s religious inclinations and fear of God, they lured innocent people saying that serving God by offering a virgin to the temple is more religious and it promoted the idea of dedicating girls to Gods or Goddesses in the temples.

Originally, the term ‘Devadasi’: means a ‘Servant of God’, was something like a priestesses who sacrificed her physical pleasures and family life and choose to serve God by being a saint. She was respected in the society and her blessings were sought before any auspicious ceremonies and functions.
The religious leaders converted these noble women into virtual prostitutes who had no other way out of it. The general public were brain washed that religious practices as prescribed by the leaders were the only means of emancipation for human kind.

The social reformers in India, the women activists and freedom fighters have all tried to enact Legislations to put an end to this barbaric system. This dates back to the efforts of Rajarammohan Roy, Eswara Chandra Vidyasagar, Irawati Karve and Govinda Ranade, periyar, E.V. Rama Swamy who not only fought for abolition of the Devadasis system but also encouraged the youths to marry the Devadasis. The various State Governments in India, enacted legislation to abolish 'Devadasi system'. The Government of Karnataka, passed the legislation in 1982 and the Government of Andhra Pradesh in 1988. In spite of these enacted legislations, the evil cult of Devadasis system is being practised in almost all the states in India. The A.P State Government has now thought of eradicating the evil of Devadasi system through rehabilitation programmes.

The Devadasi women who are called by different names in A.P: like Mathammas, Jogins, Basavins, in three different regions of Andhra Pradesh, namely coastal Andhra, Rayalaseema and Telangana are ultimately one type of destitute women belonging to the Madiga, a sub caste of Scheduled Castes who have a very low standard of living. Even though they are called by different names in different regions but their life style is the same.

Theories of Origin of Devadasi custom in India

Devadasi custom is an age old institution of India, which is not practiced in temples belonging to both Little and Great Traditions. But there are no
documents to tell how and why exactly the custom got originated. Survey of existing literature on the custom also yields nothing in concrete about this. However, by studying these we will come to know that the custom got support from religious, political, economic and social situations which prevailed in the society in the period and region. The Devadasi custom had a place in these systems and were also provided with socio-religious statuses and also got paid for their maintenance from the temples and devotees in terms of cash, food and clothing. They had certain roles which were played by them alone and as a result it become an obligation on the part of a few families to dedicated one of their girls to provide a Devadasi. Naturally over the years, it became their right owing to the socio-economic and religious status and roles it brought to the family or clan. As a result, even today Devadasi and her family or clan have obligation to society.

A survey of literature on Devadasi custom in India reveals that here again, a hierarchy is maintained similar to the arrangement of castes. Though temples of all castes maintain Devadasi, it is only those of upper castes, which are highly sanskritized and rich which could maintain several types of them to perform both ritual and secular roles. The girls dedicated from upper castes were allowed to perform a few ritual roles and the others had only the secular. The duties and roles of Devadasi generally fell into two types of services towards the deity and mobility. In other words they provided secular and bodily pleasures. Owing to the degeneration of the caste norms as a whole, like their faith and temple organization, the Devadasi attached to these also got degenerated. They finally became prostituting women; providing only the secular and bodily pleasures. Here again the Devadasi from upper castes were taken by the upper caste men and as concubines, and the others went as commercial prostitutes.
In the absence of definite documentary evidence to throw light on the origin of Devadasi custom, a few theories are as follows. They are (a) Occupation or Mother Goddess theory, (b) sanskritization theory, (c) Religious theory, (d) Racial theory, (e) Political or selfless citizen theory, (f) Matriarchy to Patriarchy theory, (g) Lineage continuation theory and (h) Traditional theory.

a) Occupation or Mother Goddess Theory

According to the theory of origin of the caste system advocated by Hutton (1945), groups which followed certain occupations finally resulted into castes of today. To maintain occupational skills and secrets, the different groups lived at the places where raw materials for their occupations were available and those who wanted their services or commodities either went to their settlements or bought during fairs. Each of these occupational groups had their own deities who helped or guarded them and their occupational secrets. These deities had women as priestesses, who negotiated with the nature gods. Later taking a certain patch of land from the ruler of the land for cultivation paying land tax in return in the form of food grains and dairy products, resulted in the birth of agricultural communities. To facilitate their cultivation activity, they took a few craft and service castes who shifted their residence from craftsmen villages to cultivator's villages. They established minor shrines to their caste deities and also continued to dedicate girls to them. Living in a new community; with no kin or ritual ties made their stay uncomfortable. The cultivators who had become owners of the village, formed different groups with altogether different occupational, ritual and social background. To bridge the gap and to come closer, the immigrant craft castes used their dedicated women, to establish the link. Since these women now belonged to the deity, both the groups did not find any conflicts either structural or ritual in having such links.
On the other hand, society approved this relation since it saved the landlord from disgrace resulting from 'marrying' a woman from another group. It also did not amount to any commitments on his part towards the woman and the children born of her and of this union. Further, to have a fruitful season or activity, it was also required of their Devadasi to have a human husband and the landlord served this purpose. This also fitted well into the belief system of the people since at the level of the shrine, the ruler of the land played this role. Thus both groups i.e. the clients and patrons used this institution to lead an orderly life.

b) Sanskritization Theory

Under this theory, the process of Sanskritization continued. The non-sanskritic shrines, especially in South India which were mostly dedicated to Mother Goddesses, got Sanskritized. Together with the support of the ruler of the land, the Brahmin priests added a male deity to the shrine and also created myths saying that the new male deity is the husband or master of the Goddess. When this was accepted, the priests also demanded sexual union with the priestesses of the local tradition. As a result, for some generations the two traditions continued to co-exist. As the Sanskritization reached a particular level, the religious functionaries started making use of every opportunity they got including creating myths to degrade and condemn the goddesses and the traditions. This also reduced the status of the priestesses to that of the Devadasi today.
c) Religious Theory

It is the part of the Sanskritic religious tradition that offering some thing to the deity was rewarded bountifully. So, when the devotees came to the shrines with the mundane problems such as bad healthy, poverty, barrenness etc., the priests interpreted these as the wrath of the deity and suggested that a vow should be taken by the devotees, which included the offering of one of their daughters to the service of the deity. To press their claims they quoted myths - both oral and written. Using the Sanskritic scripts they told the devotees belonging to poor castes and Little Tradition that they can not use the difficult paths, Gnana Margha and Karma Margha to attain salvation. According to this explanation the priests, therefore asked them to follow the easy path Bhakti Margha, where in it was required of the devotee to offer oneself totally to the deity, without questioning the consequences. They were told to follow this path since they did not have anything with them to offer to the Sanskritic deities in the form of rituals, knowledge and wealth. They were also told that where the deity was pleased with his devotees he would take the devotee into his personal service. Using this concept of divine desire, the priests started demanding girls from the devotees. These women were taken into temple service after their initiation as Devadasi.

d) Racial Theory

According to the Racial theory, the caste system with the mixing of racial groups, castes were born. Based on this, we propose that, as migrants, when the aliens came to India only a few women came with them and men took the local women as their sex partners. The local women were taken only after neutralising their position by dedicating them to local or their own deities, as Devadasi. This
facilitated both the groups in taking or giving women without any structural clashes since the women now belonged neither to the migrant or dominant group nor to the subjugated; but to the deity. The custom continued to exist even after the improvement of position of availability of women for marriage among them. So the dedicated women continued to serve the sexual purpose of the dominant (upper) caste groups, in the name of religion.

e) Political or Selfless Citizen Theory

Under the political theory, that a few rulers of India especially from the south wanted soldiers who were free from family burden. Wherever they went in the territory of their kings they were provided with food and women by the local or village chiefs, who were dedicated to the local deities. These soldiers in Karnataka, mostly belonged to Nayaka or Talwar caste, a warrior group. Naturally many of their men were killed or disabled in the wars and also many women, were left without men to marry. So, as a custom, a section of their women both maidans and widows were dedicated to the local deities, for which there were provisions. Their main job was to serve the soldiers both sexually and in terms of cooking, washing and so on, during their stay in the village. To give the children born of them a legitimate status they were dedicated to the caste deity. The custom of keeping a section of men and women unmarried by the rulers of the past, has resulted in the propagation of the Devadasi custom.

f) Matriarchy to Patriarchy Theory

Under this theory of origin of Devadasi custom in the past throughout India, and especially in the South, the institution of matriarchy prevailed. Naturally women stayed in their natal homes owning and running the family and
received their visiting 'husbands' here. Their deities were also female and were worshiped by a set of priestesses who had taken a vow to serve them. These women remained in the service of the deity till they wanted to maintain their virginity. When they decided to sacrifice their virginity, they took human husbands as sex partners and vacated their positions to the younger girls from their clan.

With the coming of the dominant patriarchal groups, with male deities, the ruler of the land or village claimed that he was the representative of the husband of their caste or lineage deity and these dedicated women were abducted. This was accepted both logically and politically. However, even after the society changed from the matriarchal system to the patriarchal system, the institution of clan deity and dedication of girls to the deity continued. To claim their position, the girls as a custom continue to receive their human husbands to propitiate the tradition.

g) Lineage Continuity Theory

Under this theory, among a few castes of Karnataka when a couple failed to beget a son to continue their lineage, they asked one of their daughters to have sex freely with any man of her choice (Basavi) and beget a son and help the family in the continuation of the lineage (Mahal, 1971 and 1987). To bring legitimate status to her sexual union and her children, she was dedicated to their clan deity. This is how the custom of Devadasi came into existence.

h) Traditional Theory

Under the Traditional theory, in heaven Lord Indra, the king of gods, has Apsara with names like Rambha, Urvashi, Menaka, etc., who are not only
beautiful but also talented singers, dancers and sex partners. With the kings on earth claiming that they are the representatives of the king of gods, they too started equipping their courts with all things and positions such as spiritual teachers, ministers, attendants, dancers and singers. Like Indra, they too used them for their own entertainment as well as that of other nobles. To get a divine status like them the women were initiated as Devadasi to the principal deity of the land and also maintained by the temple or court. In this capacity the Devadasi called themselves the nymphs of the earth (Bhulokada Apsareyaru).

This custom of having women for entertainment in all courts continued down the line to the last administrative unit, the village. Whenever one territory was conquered by another ruler or an old ruler was replaced by a young one, the new master discarded the old women and initiated young girls into service for this purpose. In this way their number increased at all levels. When the feudal and village lords who represented the king in each and every village got the same setup modeled after lord Indra resulted in the Devadasi tradition of today.

**Devadasis in Africa**

We can find the custom similar to Devadasi system in other countries too. As per reports appearing in newspapers and magazines, Devadasi system existed in various areas of Ghana and Togo in Africa. These African Devadasis also are facing similar problems of Devadasis in India. They are also called as wives of the Gods but they are also satisfying the sexual urge of the priests.

According to the Washington Times, thousands of young girls are religious slaves in Ghana, Togo, Benin and Nigeria where they serve as concubines of priests.
This practice, began in the 7th century. Girls as young as 10 years in age are handed over to priests of the indigenous temples, where they are made concubines once they reach puberty.

Ghana is now trying to outlaw this practice, victims of which are called 'Trokosi'.

The U.S. Embassy in AccraBoateng was told by the priest of the 'Avekedome temple' that to pacify the gods, the virgins were brought into serve priests. The priest said that he had 20 'Trokosis'. He had about 300 children from the 'Trokosis' and numerous wives.

Devadasis in Ancient India

Archaeologists and historians who indulged in through studies of excavations of Harappa-Mohenjodaro sites, confirmed that the religion of these people was of the type practiced by many other early agricultural civilizations in Mediterranean area and the middle east. Such religion laid emphasis on fertility rites and the worship of Mother-Goddess.

Among such other evidences, the bronze 'dancing girl' figurines needs our attention. The figurine is of a girl, naked wearing a heavily studded necklace and a series of bangles covering almost an arm. She has dressed her hair in a complicated design. She is standing in a provocative posture with one arm on her hip and one lanky leg half bent. This young woman has an air lively apartness quite different from those of works of other ancient civilizations. Her thin boyish figure and those of uninspiring mother-Goddess, indicate criteria of female beauty among Harappa and Mohenjodaro. People were strikingly different from those of later India. Referring to this bronze figurine Basham,
with certain reservations Jumps to the conclusion. Thus this dancing girl is a representative of temple dancers and prostitutes, such as existed in contemporary middle Eastern Civilization and were an important feature of late Hindu culture, but this can not be proved. One can note that Historians remained silent about existence of temple or common place of worship in Harappa and Mohenjodaro civilization.

In early literature, we find abundant references to secular prostitutes, dancers and courtesans. But specific references to temple dancers and sacred prostitution are not traced. Classics like Vatsyana’s Kamasutra (250 A.D) deals in detail about courtesans. There is however no direct reference to sacred prostitution. He mentions dancing, singing and playing of musical instruments as among chief requirements not only for a prostitute but also any married woman wishing to keep her husband’s affections.

The next important work is of Shudraka who is considered as a treat poet of India. He wrote two classics during the 6th century A.D. They are Dasa Kumara Charita (Adventures of ten princes) and Mrichchha Katika (Claycart). The later treats of the courtship and marriage of a poor Brahmin and an affluent, generous prostitute by name Vasanta Sena. A certain passage of Dasa Kumara, Charita shows how all female accomplishments were to be found in the courtesans. Such courtesans were well equipped with education and conversational power.

In India, ancient kingdoms were usually concentrated in the north and the south. Consequently foreign travelers in the past naturally were attracted towards these kingdoms and corresponding capital cities. Their accounts were confined to religious and social conditions of such cities.
Among such reports, the earliest references to the dancing girls of temples in Central India were made by the Chinese traveler Chan-Ju-Kwa in his work, Chu-Fan-Chi, dealing with the Chinese and Arab trade of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Explaining about Gujarat he mentions "Four thousand Buddhist Temple buildings, in which live over twenty thousand dancing girls who sing twice daily while offering flowers". He also mentions about similar customs in Cambodia. They are called 'a-nan' derived from the Sanskrit word 'Ananda' meaning 'Joy' or 'happiness'.

In Central India towards east, Jagannath Puri is a famous sacred spot. To this temple, many Devadasis are attached even today. An exclusive study has been conducted by a senior professor of British Columbia University (Margalil:1985) very recently but the genesis of this system is not dealt with by scholars. However, we have to depend upon W. Ward, the Bapist missionary, who wrote about this system prevailing in Puri during 1815. Referring to the temple of Jagannatha he writes, "It is well-authenticated fact that at this place a number of females of infamous character are employed to dance and sing before the God". They live in separate houses, not in the temple. Persons going to see Jagannatha are often guilty of criminal actions that the officiating brahmins there had adulterous connection with them. Since Ward's days, very little has been added to literature pertaining to Devadasis of Central regions of India.

Historians have also traced an inscription from the Chebrolu of Krishna District in Andhra Pradesh dating back to 1139 A.D. The inscription records that some dancing girls were in service at the temple of Nageshvara right from the age of eight years (Epigraphia Carnatica:V: AK: 105: 1139 A.D.).
Turning our attention to south-central regions we come across Nizams of Hyderabad area. Usually Telugu dancing girls are called by the name 'bogam'. These dancing girls fall under two categories such as Hindus and Mohammedans. Hindu 'Bogam', the titles 'Sani', 'Nayaka' are attached to their names and for Mohammedans 'Jan' or 'Nayakan' are attached.

Devadasis in Eastern India

The Jagannath temple of Puri too followed the custom of dedicated girls to the Lord and even today there are a few Devadasis there. The Devadasis of Puri are called both 'Ganika' as well as 'Vesya'. Some of them speak of themselves as 'earthly apsaras' the 'apsaras' being the lovely women dancers and singers who adorn the court of the king of Gods, Indra.

In Assam too, the custom was popular among the Saivite temples. Nothing a point of difference between the Devadasi system in Assam and the one existing in South India, Singh says that in Assam a Devadasi was dedicated to the temple for the sole purpose of dancing at the time of the arti (offering made to God) twice a day and no other association is made with the profession as in the case of South India.

Devadasis in Northern India

During the reign of Mohammedan Sultanate at Delhi (1195-1340), the Hindu Temples faced complete destruction. Many upheavals like bloody battles, enforced slavery, etc., adversely and continually affected the Hindu religious practices. This trend continued even during the era of Moghul empire.
In Northern India among 'gandharbas' also similar custom exists. The name 'gandharbas' is taken from the heavenly musicians who attend on the god's Indra's court. These people are mainly concentrated in places like Banaras, Ghaziabad and Allahabad.

Devadasis in South India

In South India, followers of Hindu faith have suffered comparatively less from the devastating hands of alien invaders. Moreover, the craze for constructing a number of temples and constantly increasing the Hindu pantheon ways appears to have been greater in the south. As a result most of the ancient rituals have become indelibly imprinted upon the minds of the people. Hence, in many cases we may find earlier and original forms of any particular ceremony or custom in this area. Consequently, considerably fuller accounts of sacred prostitution are available here. Almost all the writings of travelers and missionaries include some remarks on the institution of the sacred prostitutes in this region including Madras, Kerala and Karnataka. In case of a set weavers, called Kakatias near Conjeevaram, the eldest daughter was usually dedicated to the temple. The dedication ceremony and associated rites were as follows as explained by Thurston.

The girl is taken to a temple, with rice, coconuts, sugar. A plantain leaf is placed on the ground and on that a brass vessel, containing water, mango leaves and darbha grass are put into vessel, a coconut and some flowers are placed on the top of it, and the water is purified by mantras and the leaves, grass and water are lightly thrown over the girls. A thread is then tied to her left wrist, and she swallows a pill of the five products of the cow for purification (Panchagavya). She is then branded with a charka on the left, and her forehead is marked with
the god's iramim, the priest prays for her and she distributes alms and presents. A mangalasutra which has been put at the Gods feet, is then placed on her neck by a senior dancing girls, to whom she makes obeisance. At night she again comes to the temple and dances before the idol with bells on her feet (Thurston:1909: Vol.VI:36). The dedication ceremony varies according to region. This is evident from other records. He mentions dancing, singing and playing of musical instruments as among chief requirements not only for a prostitute but also for any married woman wishing to keep her husband's affections. He even classifies prostitutes into nine classes, the most honoured of whom is ganika. 'Such a woman' says Vatsayana, "will always be rewarded by kings and praised by gifted persons, and her connection will be sought by many people" (Burton: 1923:166).

The next important work is of Sudraka who is considered as a great poet of India. He wrote two classics during the 6th century A.D. They are Dasa Kumara Charita (Adventures of ten princes) and Mrichchha Katika (Clay cart). The later treats of the courtship and marriage of a poor Brahmin and an affluent, generous prostitute by name Vasantasena. This work is important because it gives some idea of the social conditions of the middle and low class life of the Sixth century A.D. A certain passage of Dasa Kumara Charita shows how all female of bangles cover almost an arm. She has dressed her hair in a complicated design. Referring to this bronze figurine. Basham, with certain reservations says "This dancing girl is a representative of temple dancers and prostitute, such as existed in contemporary middle eastern civilization and were an important feature of later Hindu culture, but this cannot be proved". (Bashan:1972:21). One cannot place of worship in Harappa and Mohenjodaro civilization. In a number of sites of the Indus valley civilization rough terracotta
statuette of women are found abundantly. These statuettes are naked or half-naked with elaborate hair styles. It is presumed that every household maintained such icons of the mother-Goddess.

In early literature we find abundant references to secular prostitutes, dancers and courtesans. But specific references to temple dancers and sacred prostitution are not traced. Classics like Vatsayana's Kamasutra (250 A.D.) deal in detail about courtesans. There is, however, no direct reference to sacred prostitution.

They are Vaishnavites. Ganesha is the patron of the dancing girls since he is regarded by them as the author of music. They offer him wreaths of flowers and sweetmeat made of sesame and sugar every Wednesday. (Croke: 1986: Vol : 56-80).

There are certain gipsy tribes named 'bediyas' and 'nats', who are dancers, acrobats and prostitutes in Bengal. But these castes have no connection with temple worship.

Hence in North India the institution dedicating to temple dancing is very rare. This may be due to Mohammedan rule which destabilized temple administration and sacred complexes were frequently attacked by alien plunderers. However, dedicated dancers were not attached to any temples as such. Mohammedan puritans like Aurangzeb treated this institution and other Hindu cults with contempt. He wanted to do away with such cults. In fact, he succeeded in his endeavors to some extent. Accomplishments were to be found in the courtesans. Such Courtesans were well equipped with education and conversational power.
Apart from these general comments on courtesans, references to dancing girls at temples may be found in Kalidasa’s Meghadoota, it is said that dancing girls were supposed to be present in Mahakala Temple of Ujjain at the time of evening worship.

Basavis of Karnataka

The term ‘Basavi’ is the female gender of Basava the bull. However the term literally means the ‘she-bull’ and carries with it the import of ‘procreator’. Basavis in Karnataka also are the women forced by their parents or the community into temple service.

The main difference between a Jogin or Jogati and a Devadasi lies in the fact that the Devadasi custom is not confined to any particular caste, whereas Jogins generally come from the weaker and oppressed sections of society.

The term is a corrupt form of the word ‘Veshya’ – a prostitute. The term was also used to refer to the women dedicated to God, usually God Hanuman, in the same manner as a Devadasi was dedicated. But after dedication she was allowed to live with anybody from her own caste or a higher caste, but who promised her maintenance. A Veshi was commonly found in the Dharwar district of Karnataka.

Duties of a Devadasi

Their official duty consisted in dancing and singing within the temple twice a day, morning and evening, and also at public ceremonies. Their duties were not however confined to religious ceremonies. Ordinary politeness required that when persons of any distinction made formal visits to each other they were to be accompanied by a certain number of these women. These women were also present at marriages and other family gatherings.

In return for their services they received Inam lands and cash allowance out of the endowments of the temple.
Gandhiji and Devadasi System

Though much has been said about Gandhiji, his view on the liberation of Devadasis has not been given due importance in the social history of India. In his enthusiasm to purify womanhood of its evils, the Devadasi system also came for his outright condemnation. Started probably from 1921, his involvement in the process of its abolition was significant. As moralist and idealist, he wanted its early abolition. Influenced by his enthusiasm, social reformers came forward to work to bring its ultimate end.

Gandhiji observed that the word Devadasis is a 'cynicism for prostitutes' during his visit to Tamilnadu, while he was in Chettinad. He equated the tradition 'of assigning girls of tender age to shame of religion' as 'the hideous immoral custom'. The money lenders of Chettinad were chided for their encouragement of this wretched profession under the garb of religion.

Gandhiji said, "There are many temples in this country which are no better than brothels". Instead of fostering pity and devotion, the temples encouraged moral filth and accumulated wealth. The deplorable conditions that prevailed in those temples bear ample evidence to prove the maxim 'where wealth accumulates, men decay'.

According to him, the pity of it is that the vast majority of men who visit these pestilent haunts are married men and therefore commit a double sin. They sin against their wives to whom they have sworn allegiance and they sin against the sisters whose purity they are bound to guard with as much jealousy as that of their own blood sisters. Hence he advised men connected with these
things to purge society of this pest. Gandhiji learnt from deputations that poverty was the root cause of this crime. When he questioned a few Devadasis who came on deputation as to why they preferred that profession, they said "not one of us likes it, but how to maintain ourselves. Gandhiji then asked, 'supports I took you away and gave you sufficient food and clothing and education and clean surroundings, would you not leave this life of shame and come with me? They said, yes.

The religious purist Abbe Dubois of Pandichery, the British official Francis Buchanan and an English professor Gilbert Slater questioned the religious sanction behind this institution. The Indian social reformer, and the Madras Hindu Social Reform Association all raised questions about its sanctity. Veeresalingam, Venkataratnam Naidu and P. Anandacharlu tried to take the problem to the doors of the public. It is evident from records that some steps were taken to prohibit it from southern India specifically from 1868. Many state governments took steps in 1906 and 1907 towards that direction. In 1910, the government of Mysore banned in that state. In 1912 some Indian members of the Indian council introduced a bill aiming at its abolition. In 1913 the Government of India itself brought a bill to prohibit it. In 1925, an act of the Government of India made traffic in minor girls a criminal offence. As all early measures failed to put an end to it, it engaged the attention of Gandhiji.

He requested other Hindu women to extend their helping hand to redeem the sin of their fallen sisters. To quote Gandhiji the proper method of dealing with brothels is for the women to carry on a double propaganda; amongst women who sell their honour for a livelihood, and amongst men whom they must shame into behaving better towards their sisters. It seems that his words
has salutary effect. Social reformers came forward to work to prohibit the institution. Reformers such as N.Lakshmanan, Thiru.V.K. Periyar, and Muthulakshmi Reddi spoke in terms uncompromising about the evil effects of this system on society. Due to their efforts the abolition of the system was accepted for publication in 1930. Since it dealt only with the Inam holding Devadasis, it took some more years to bring about its ultimate end. In Travancore an order issued by the regent Maharani, abolished it from its temples in 1930. In Cochin, a new regulation of 1936, introduced by Dewan Shammukham Chetty, brought an end to this system. In spite of an act of 1909-1910 which legally put an end to the system, it seemed to prevail in Karnataka. The study made above shows how Gandhiji viewed the entire institution of Devadasis and how he worked to bring about its abolition from the temples of Southern India.

Statement of the Research problem

The present research study is an attempt to deal with the socio-economic conditions of Mathammas in Chittoor district in the State of Andhra Pradesh. Mathammas are nothing but Devadasis. The Mathamma woman is dedicated to a deity or a sacred object until life long.

Origin of Mathammas

The caste system as it is characterised by a status hierarchy, the Scheduled Castes or so called untouchables are at the base, in fact, at the lowest social ritual status. These sections had, on account of their low social and ritual status been subjected to a variety of disabilities under the traditional system. All though the ages, the untouchables had suffered from social injustice and
exploitation. They were denied all privileges and benefits as had been enjoyed by the upper castes. Their movements, their entry into temples, public places, educational institutions, their field of activities in respect of worship, practice of rituals and customs, performance and observance of festivals and important religious ceremonies were restricted. On account of their being on the lowest rung of the social ladder, they were forced to take up unclean and menial occupations and jobs which yielded low incomes. They were associated with a variety of specialised traditional occupations such as scavenging, cobbling, disposal of carcases, basketry etc. As a consequence, these castes have remained socially, economically and educationally backward for several centuries.

Segregation is strictly enforced. The Scheduled Castes are treated as untouchables, and they are generally required to live at a distance from the main village, i.e., in the out skirts of the village. These places in which Harijans are inhabited are known as 'Harijanwadas' or Malawadas'.

In traditional Hindu society, there were legal and ritual sanctions which prevented the lower castes from imitating the way and the life styles of the upper castes. There are certain elements in the life styles of the Harijans which are perhaps ranked even lower in the traditional Hindu scheme of values. In any given region, the social rank of a caste is closely related to the dietary habits of its members. In general, beef eating is ranked rather low. Harijans not only eat beef but particular kinds of meat which are held to be unclean, indecent, vulgar and sacrilegious. Those who eat beef are assigned the lowest social rank. They are known as 'Madigas'.
The Mathammas belong to Madiga caste, a sub-caste of Scheduled Castes in A.P. The Madigas are the great leather working caste of the Telugu country, and correspond to the Chakkiliyans of the Tamil area.

'The Madigas', Mr. N.G. Chetty writes, "belong to the left hand caste, and often quarrel with the Malas (right-hand). In 1871 a Madiga, having contrived to obtain a red cloth as a reward from the police superintendent, wore it on his head, and went in procession on horseback by the main bazaar street. This resulted in a disturbance, in which a European Inspector was severely hurt by a Mala, who had mistaken him for the superintendent. The two factions fixed, by mutual understanding, the streets by which each was to proceed, and no quarrels have since occurred". During the celebration of village festivals, an unmarried Madiga Woman, called for the occasion Mathangi (a favorite deity), abuses and spits upon the people assembled, and they do not take this as an insult, because they think that her spittle removes the pollution. The woman is, indeed, regarded as the incarnation of the goddess herself. Similarly, the Malas use very obscene language, when the god is taken in procession to the streets of the caste people. Concerning the Mathangi, she is an unmarried woman of the Madiga caste, chosen after a most trying ordeal, unless she happens to be descended from a previous Mathangi, to represent the goddess. She must indicate her fitness by suitable prophetic utterances and her nomination is not confirmed till she has obtained divine approval at the temple of a certain Village near Kumbum in Kurnool. When she has been finally confirmed in her honors, she enjoys the privileged of adorning her face with a profusion of turmeric and red powder, and of carrying Margosa (Melia Azadiracta) leaves about her. She is unmarried, but without being bound by a vow of celibacy. Her business is to preside at the purificatory ceremonies that precede all festivities.
When Maha Lakshmi, or Poleramma, or Ankamma, or any other of the village deities is to have her festival, the nearest Mathangi is applied to her necklace of cowry (cypraa moneta) shells deposited in a well for three days, before she is allowed to put it on for the ceremony. The master of the ceremonies, his male and female relations, then stand in a line, and the Mathangi runs round and round them. Uttering what appears to be meaningless exclamations spitting upon all of them, and touching them with her stick. Her touch and Saliva are believed to purge all unseemliness of body and soul, and are invited by men who would ordinarily scorn to approach her and it passes one's comprehension how she should be honoured with the task of purifying the soul and body of high caste Reddis and purge-proud komatis.

According to one of them, the head of Renuka, the wife of the sage Bhrigu, who was beheaded by larders, fell in a Madiga house and grew into a Madiga woman. According to another legend, a certain king prayed to be blessed with a daughter, and in answer the gods sent him a golden parrot, which soon after perched on an ant-hill, and disappeared into it. The disappointed father got the ant-hill excavated, and was rewarded for his pains by finding his daughter rise, a maid of divine beauty, and she came to be worshipped as the Mathangi. It is interesting to note that Mathangis were an ancient live of kings 'somewhere in south', and the Madigas call themselves Mathangi Makkalu or children of Matangi or Durga, who is their goddess.

The system of making Basavins, which prevails among the Madigas of the ceded districts is apparently not in vogue among those of the Telugu country, where, however, there are in some places, a class of prostitutes called Mathangi, Mathammans, or Matha, who are held in much respect. In connection
with the Basavin system, it is recorded, in the Madras Law Report, 1892, that upon the whole, the evidence seems to be establish that, among the Madigas, there is widespread custom of performing in the temple at Unchangidurgam, a marriage ceremony, the result of which is that the girl is married without possibility of widowhood or divorce; that she is at liberty to have intercourse with man at pleasure; that her children are heirs to her father, and keep up his family; and that Basavin' nieces, being made Basavin, become their heirs. The Basavins seem in some cases to become prostitutes, but to language used by the witnesses generally points only to free intercourse with men, and not necessarily to receipt of payment for use of their bodies. In fact they acquire the right of intercourse with men, without more discredit than that accrues to the men of their caste for intercourse with women who are not their wives.

We shall now proceed to enquire who this Mathangi was and how she came to be worshipped there Jamadhagni Maharishi known, also a Begawan on account of his godly power and virtues, married Renuka the daughter of Renu, and had five sons by her, the youngest of whom was the famous Parasura, an incarnation of Vishnu. Once upon a time, says the Bhagavathapurana, Renuka having gone to the Ganga, saw the king of the Ghandarvas wearing garlands of lotus, to play with the Apsaras. Having gone to the river to fetch water, she whose heart was somewhat attracted by Chitaratha (the king of the Gandharvas) who was playing, forget the time of Yajna (Sacrifice) coming to feel the delay, and afraid of the purse of the Muni and remained standing with folded plans. The Muni (Jamadhagni), coming to know of the unchasteness of his wife, got enraged, and said, "O My Sons! kill this sinner". Although thus directed they did not do so. The said (PARASU) Rama, who was well aware of the power of
the Muni in respect of meditations and asceticism, killed being directed by his father, his mother along with his brothers. The son of Saryavathi (Jamadhagni) was pleased, and requested Rama to pray for any favour. Rama desired the reanimation of those killed, and their forgetfulness of the fact of their having been killed. Immediately they got up, as though after a deep sleep.

The version locally prevalent is somewhat different. Jamadhagni Bhagwan's hermitage was near this kona, and he was worshipping the god Surabeswar, and doing taps (penance) there. One day, his wife Renuka Devi went, very early in the morning, to the river Gundlakamma to bathe, and fetch water for her husband's sacrifice rites. She was accompanied, as was her wont on such occasions, by a female slave of the chuckler (Leather-Worker) caste, as a sort of bodyguard and attendant. While she was bathing, the great warrior Karthaviriyarjuna with a thousand arms happened to fly across the sky on some business of his own, and Renuka saw his form reflected in the water, and was pleased with it in her mind. It must be mentioned that she never used to take any vessel with her to fetch water, for her chastity was such that she had power to roll water into a pot-like shape, as if it were wax, and thus bring it home. On this day, however, she failed to effect this try what she might, and she was obliged to return home empty-handed. In the meanwhile, the sage, her husband, finding that his wife did not return as usual, learnt through his wisdom sight what had happened, and ordered his son Parasurama to slay his sinful mother. Parasurama went towards the river accordingly, and seeing his mother returning, aimed an arrow at the which severed her head from her body, and also similarly served, with its unspent force, the head of the chuckler woman who was coming immediately behind his mother. Parasurama returned to his father without even
noticing this accident, and when his father, pleased with prompt obedience, offered him any boon, he prayed for the re-animation of his mother. Jamadhagni then gave him some holy water out of his vessel, and told him to put together the dismembered parts, and sprinkle some water over them. Parasurama went off in great delight and haste, and as it was still dark and early in the morning, he wrongly put his mother's head on the chuckler woman's trunk, and sprinkled water on them. The seeing another head and another body lying close by, he thought that they belonged to the female slave whom he had unwittingly killed, and he put anthem also together, and re-animated them. He was extremely repentant when he found out the mistakes he had committed, but as there was no rectifying them without another double murder he produced the two women before his father, and begged to be forgiven. The sage finally accepted the person with his late consort's head as his wife, and granted to the other woman the status of an interior deity, in response to her prayers, and owing to her having his wife's body this was the origin of Mathangi.

There are some permanent inam (rent-free) lands belonging to this shrine, and there is always a Madiga vestal virgin known as Mathangi who is the high priestess; or rather the embodied representative of the Brahman-Chuckler goddess, and who enjoys the fruits of the inams. Mathangi is prohibited from marrying, and when a mathangi dies, her successor is chosen in the following manner. All the chuckler girls of the village, between the ages of eight and ten, who have not attained puberty, are assembled before the shrine and invoking hymns are chanted amid a flourish of trumpets, drums, and other accessories. The girl who becomes possessed on whom the goddess descends is the chosen vessel, and she is invested with the insignia of her office, a round sieve, a bunch
of margosa (Melia-Azadirachta) leaves, a snake-headed bamboo stick, a piece of cotton thread rope with some cowries (cypraa monets shells) strung on it, and a small vessel of kunkuma (coloured eviline powder). A vow of lifelong celibacy is also administered to her. Curiously enough, this shrine is generated by all castes, from the Brahman downwards. We were informed that, at the time of worship, the chuckler priestess dances about in wild frenzy, and she is given to drink, which she is not in frequently spits on her devotees, and even Brahmans regard this as auspicious and not in the least polluting. We had the pleasure of witnessing a 'possessed dance' by the reigning Mathangi, with her drummer in attendance. She is a chuckler woman, about thrifty years of age, and, but for the insignia of here office, not any way differing from the rest of her class. Though unmarried she had several children, but this was apparently no disqualification. We were standing before the shrine of the seven mothers when the drummer invoked the goddess by chanting a Telugu hymn, keeping time on his drum, the meaning of the hymn was to this effect as far as we could make out:

Satya Surabesa Kona, Gowthamas Kamadhenu. The headless trunk is satya Surbesa Kona! Your father. Giri Raju Kamadeva Jamadhagni mamuni behead the trunk; silently Jamadhagni cut off the arms. did you the headless trunk in Jamadhenuvanam, the headless trunk of Jamandhagni your fathers golden sword, did you ask to be born a virgin in the snake pit.

While chanting the above, the drummer was dancing round and round the woman, and beating wildly on his drum. The woman began to tremble all over, and soon it was visible that the goddess had descended on her. Then the drummer, wilder and more frantic than ever, began to praise the goddess in these words:
Are you wearing bells to your ankles, O Mother? Are you wearing cowries, O Mother? Dancing and Singing. O Mother! We pray to thee O Mother! possessed and falling on the ground, I implore thee, O mother! O mother, who went to Delhi and Oruganti with a sieve in the right-hand, with a wand in the left; with bells tinkling at her ankles the mother went to Oruganti town, the mother went away.

During this chant, the woman waxes with the drummer, and dances fiercely round and round, always, facing him. Then comes the appearing chant, which the drummer draws out in a quivering and solemn tone, and without dancing about.

By the feet of the thirty three crores, by the feet of the sixty crores, by the feet of the Devas, peace. The woman then stands with closed eyes, panting for breath, and quite exhausted.

On ordinary days, the Manthangi goes about the villages, collecting the offerings of her devotees, and, we take it, she is never in much want. There are also local Mathangis in other villages; but they are all said to be subordinate to the Tidimilla woman, who is the high pontiff of the institution. We were informed that there was an old palmyra-leaf manuscript in existence, describing the institution and the ceremonies (mostly tantric and phallic) in detail.

Among the Madigas of Tumkur in Mysore, the Mathangis must apparently belong to one of two sects, Belliyoru or Malloru.

The Madiga Asadis, who are males, have to go through an initiation ceremony very similar to that of the Mathangi. But a necklace of pebbles is substituted for the bottu, and the Vakkaliga priest touches the novice's shoulders.
with Flowers, Turmeric Powder and Kunkumum. The Asadis are musicians who sing songs and recite stories about Ellamma. They play on a musical instrument called chaudike, which is a combination of a drum and stringed instrument. The Mathangis and Asadis, both being dedicated to Ellamma, are eminently qualified to remove pollution for many castes who are Ellamma vakkulu or flowers of Ellamma. A Lotus device, or figures of pothuraja and Mathangi, are drawn on the ground, after it has been cleansed with cow-dung. The Mathangi, with her insignia, sits in the centre of the device, and the Asadis, sitting close by, sing the praises of Ellamma to the accompaniment of the chaudike. The Mathangis and Asadi then drink toddy, and go about the house, where in the former sprinkle toddy into with the Margosa twig. Sometimes they pour some of the toddy into their mouths, and spit it out all over the house. The pot, in which the toddy is placed, is in some places called pallaki (palanquin).

The Madigas claim to be the children of Mathangi. 'There was', Mr. H.A. Stuart writes, formerly a Mathanga dynasty in the Canarese country, and the Madigas are believed by some to be descendants of people who were once a ruling race. Mathangi is a Sanskrit name for Kali, and it is possible that the Madigas once played an important part in the worship of the god. The employment of Chakkiliyans and Madiga women in Shakti worship gives some colour to this supposition. According to Fleet, the Mathangas and the Katakcuris are mentioned in connection with Mangalisa, who was the younger brother and successor of Kirivarama I, and whose reign commenced in Saka (489 A.D. 567-8), and terminated in Saka (532 A.D. 610-11). Of the Mathangas nothing is known, except the mention of them. But Mathanga means a Chandala, a man of the lowest caste, an outcaste, a Kirata mountaineer, a barbarian; and the Madigas, i.e., the Mathangas of this part of the country.
usually call themselves Mathangi makkalu, i.e., the children of Mathangi or durga, who is their goddess. It is probable, therefore, that the Mathangas of this inscription were some aboriginal family of but little power, and not of sufficient importance to have left any record of themselves". There are allusions to Mathangas in the Ramayana, and in Kādamba, a Sanskrit word, the chieftain of the cabaras is styled Mathanga. The tutelary deity of the Madigas is Mathammas or Matangi, who is said to be worship by the Komatis under the name of Kanyakaparameswari. The relations between the Madigas and Komatis are dealt with in the note on the latter caste. There is a legend to the effect that Matangi was defeated by Parasu Rama, and concealed herself from him under the tanning - pot in a Madiga's house. At the feast of pongal, the Madigas worship their tanning pots, as representing the goddess, with offerings of fowls and liquor. In addition to Mathangi, the Madigas worship Kattamma, Kattappa, Dandumari, Muneswara an other deities.

Concerning the Madigas of Mysore, Mr. T. Ananda Rao writes as follows. The Madigas are by religion Vaishnavites, Saivites, and Saktayyas and have five different gurus belonging to mutts at Kadave, Kodihalli, Kongari, Nelamangala, and Konkallu. The tribe is sometimes called Jambava or Mathanga. It is divided into two independent subdivisions, the Deshagada and others, between whom there is no intermarriage. The former, though under the above named mutts, acknowledge Srivaishnava Brahmins as their gurus, to whom they pay homage on all ceremonial occasions.

In urban localities, on account of the value in the rise of skins, they have attained to considerable affluence, both on account of the hides supplied by them, and their work as tanners, shoemakers, etc., only 355 persons returned gotras, such as Matangi, Mareecha, and Jambavarishi.
At the Mysore Census 1891, some Madigas actually returned themselves as Matanga Brahmans, producing for the occasion a certain so called Purana as their charter.

Who are Mathammams

A culture exists in the Scheduled Castes for long. If a female child of a family suffers from ill health, she is dedicated to the deity and named as 'Mathamma'. Even a new born baby may be offered to god in the same name. They practically take the baby to the temple, the naming ceremony is done. The child is given a special care from then onwards. Normally children belonging to the age group 0-5 years are compelled to undergo the ceremony, at an average of 70 percent from the age group below a year. The newly named Mathammams are under special care and will be considered as sexual objects through out her life and by the society. They will be insulted both by the society and the people. If they feel like educating themselves by going to school and attending classes, they have to face the regardlessness in that society too. Due to the above reasons these Mathammams stay illiterates. She will be turned and considered as a social property. Every April these people stage themselves for dancing in a goddess Mathamma festival conducted yearly called or Mathamma Kolupu which is a compulsion one. There is no way for them to escape from exposing them. In the present society, the dancing and exposing them are no more existing.

History of Mathammams

The prevalence of the system of Jogins or Basavins or Mathammams which is a part of Devadasi System has been noticed in several parts of Andhra Pradesh. In Chittoor District of Rayalaseema in the state of Andhra Pradesh these women are known as Mathammams. The following are the genesis of the Devadasi system.
The Devadasi system is prevalent all over India known by different names such as Bhnavinis in Goa, Devaradiyal in Tamil Nadu, Maithrees in Kerala, Natis in Assam, Muralis in Maharashtra, Basavins, Jogins and Mathammas and in Andhra Pradesh and Jagatis and Basivins in Karnataka. The word 'Devadasi' is derived from the joining of two words 'Deva' meaning 'God' and 'Dasi' meaning 'Servant' or 'slave'. So every Devadasi is a servant of god.

The Myth Behind the Dedication of Mathammas

The myth behind dedication of girls to the goddess Mathamma is stated as follows: Renuka, the consort of sage Jamadagni was pure woman. She was so pure that she could carry water in a freshly made pot. This pot, she herself moulded every day on the banks of the river, where she went to fetch water. On one of her trips to the river, she saw a Gandhrva couple bathing in the river. The reflection of the male partner bewitched her and she was struck by his handsomeness seen through just the reflection. But as a result, the pot broken and her husband knew she had 'sinned' by thinking about man who was not her husband. Angered at this blow to his saintly ego, the sage at once ordered his 12 years old son Parasurama to behead his own mother. Parasuram obeyed his father as he was told. Pleased with his son, the sage then told him to ask for any boon. The clever son asked his father to bring his mother back to life. The sage saw a Mathangi woman passing by, so he, beheaded her and attached, this head to be body of Renuka. When Renuka was thus resurrected he blessed her saying that unmarried girls who would worship her as a goddess, would be dedicated to her for the rest of their lives by marrying her for the physical fulfillment of her son Parasuram. These girls would then lose the right to turn back a man even if
he was lepor. In addition, these girls would have to go for begging for alms on Tuesdays and Fridays in the name of Yellamma as that would be their only source of livelihood.

This custom of dedicating girls to Yellamma and to the temples of the Goddess can be traced back to 3rd Century AD. During the period of Puranas, Devadasis worked in the temples as entertainers, they sang and danced at different temple functions and as part of ritualistic celebrations. There is a reference in the Puranas to the Devadasi system which flourished in India at that time. It has been mentioned thus the persons who dedicated dancing girls to temples attained "swargaloka" after death.

Dedication Ceremony of Mathammas

A young girl is dedicated to the service of a deity such as Yallamma, Poleramma etc., on an auspicious day. The dedication ceremony is conducted by the Dasaries, a Mala priest in the community called as Jangamas or Ayyavarlu. A ceremony is performed with a single feast to celebrate the occasion. A string of black beads is tied around the neck of the girl. After the dedication, there are some obligations on the Jogins, Basavins, Mathammas to utter certain Manthras and to beg on specific days in a week. The girl will not be allowed to marry.

The dedication is usually done due to illness of family members, death of the children or other family member's religious vow or desertion by husband or the acute poverty.
The total population of Mathammas or Jogins or Basavins of in Andhra Pradesh is given in Table 1.

**TABLE - 1**

Total Population of Mathammas in Andhra Pradesh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No</th>
<th>Name of the District</th>
<th>Number of the Mathammas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Kurnool</td>
<td>5286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nizambad</td>
<td>4120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Anantapur</td>
<td>2671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mahaboob Nagar</td>
<td>2087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Warangal</td>
<td>1671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Karim Nagar</td>
<td>1605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Adilabad</td>
<td>1097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Medak</td>
<td>933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ranga Reddy</td>
<td>740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Chittoor</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Nellore</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Prakasam</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>20,884 = T</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The above table clearly shows that Kurnool district has the highest number of Mathammas population followed by Nizambad district which occupies the second position in the state of A.P. Anantapur and Mahaboob Nagar occupy the third and fourth positions. Chittoor has 348 Mathammas and
the least number i.e., 26 Mathammas are found in Medak District. Nearly 40 per cent of Mathammas are living in three districts of Rayalaseema region i.e., Kurnool, Anantapur and Chittoor.

**Aims and Objectives of the Study**

Mathammas in Chittoor District of Andhra Pradesh are socially and economically different from the other communities of the society. They are extremely backward in all walks of life. They are highly neglected sections of the society. There are not many sociological studies available on Mathammas in Andhra Pradesh. Hence, the present study has become imperative. It mainly deals with the social, economical life of the Mathammas in Chittoor District of Andhra Pradesh. It is purely a sociological study, both normative and empirical. The main objectives of the study are as follows.

1. To study the origin and history of Mathammas.

2. To examine their social conditions like family, marriage and housing conditions and health conditions.

3. To measure their literacy and education.

4. To assess their economic status which includes occupation levels of income and standard of living and their indebtedness.

5. To study some case studies of Mathammas

6. To study the rehabilitation programmes of Mathammas.
Methodology

The area of the study is confined to Chittoor district in the state of Andhra Pradesh. The reason for taking Chittoor district for the study is that the investigator hails from this district. Further, the university is located in Tirupati which is in Chittoor district. This proximity which necessitated the study by choosing the district.

At present, Chittoor district comprises 66 Mandalss. Out of 66 Mandalss, 23 Mandalss have been considered and studied because all Mathammas were found in these 23 Mandalss.

The total population of Mathammas in Chittoor district (Mandal wise) is shown in the table - 2.
TABLE - 2

Total population of Mathammas in Chittoor district (Mandal wise)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No</th>
<th>Name of the Mandal</th>
<th>Number of the Mathammas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>B.N. Kandriga</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Chandragiri</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Gulipala</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>K.V.B. Puram</td>
<td>27</td>
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<td>Yerpedu</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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All the above 348 Mathammas were interviewed through the census method. Most of them were from rural Areas. Field work was carried out for one year in between May 2003 to April 2004. The data was collected from the Mathammas directly. On approaching them the Mathammas extended their fullest support and co-operation in furnishing necessary and relevant data for the study.

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The researcher employed various conventional techniques like interview - schedule and participant observation to gather relevant information from the respondents. Apart from, the use of these techniques the researcher relied on individuals as well as group interview to collect information pertaining to the social and economical aspects of the Mathammas.

The collected data was processed and tabulated manually. Keeping the requirements of the study in view, this being a limited study, it invites the attention of sociologists and social anthropologists for further research in this field as there is ample scope for social investigation.

Body of the Thesis

The data thus collected was later processed, tabulated and analysed. The entire work is divided into seven chapters.

The First Chapter deals with the Introduction. It includes the origin and history of Mathammas, theories of origin of Devadasi custom, review of literature, Aims and objectives of the study and methodology.

Second Chapter is devoted to the review of literature.

Third chapter examines their social conditions of Mathammas which comprise a brief study on family marriage, education and housing conditions and health conditions.

Fourth Chapter is devoted to the study of their economic conditions which include aspects like their occupation, income, expenditure, savings, and indebtedness.

Fifth Chapter deals with the case studies related to the Mathammas in detail.

Sixth Chapter studies the rehabilitation programmes of Mathammas.

The Last Chapter comprises summary and conclusions.